

# Qualitative Document Analysis on Cambodian Survivors and Trauma



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## Introduction

- ❖ The Cambodian Genocide occurred between 1975-1979 and took over 3 million lives. Pol Pot, leader of the Khmer Rouge, wanted citizens to all be the same and destroyed any foreign culture and technology.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ My parents were both children at the time. My grandfathers, my uncles, and an aunt on my mom's side had died during the genocide.
- ❖ 6.1% of people in the US identifies as Asian American or Pacific Islander (AAPI). 15% of those people, about 2.9 million, have reported mental illness.<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ Some issues that impact the mental health of AAPIs include: Trauma passed down from generations, expectations on youth, and stigmatized by Asian stereotypes.<sup>2</sup>

## Methods

- ❖ Trauma: "Emotional response to terrible event."<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ Coping Mechanisms: Techniques a person used in order to move on from their stimuli. It does not mean that they are healed.
- ❖ Over a 10 week period, I read multiple memoirs written by survivors of the Cambodian Genocide.
- ❖ Choosing the book
  - Eyewitness accounts written in English
  - Published from well known publishing companies
  - Written from different ages when the event occurred to get a broad perspective
- ❖ Conducted a qualitative document analysis
  - Analyzing documentary evidence to answer specific questions.<sup>3</sup>
  - Categorizing the evidence into themes

## Research Question

After a traumatic event such as the Cambodian Genocide, how do survivors cope with the aftermath? Are they truly able to move on or is there hidden trauma that they hide?

"The more I tell people, the less the nightmare haunts me. The more people listen to me, the less I hate. After some time, I had talked so much I forgot to be afraid; that is until I decided to return to Cambodia" -Loung Ung, *First They Killed My Father*



Citizens fleeing Phnom Penh in 1975<sup>4</sup>



Orphans that had survived at the S-21 Prison<sup>5</sup>

"Now I understood why I didn't feel comfortable with this easy life in good old Oregon, USA. I had been running away from my shadows. I wasn't at peace. I had much anger and pain inside of me. My past still haunted me, and now it had caught up with me. I must heal something inside me, I thought, This is something I cannot do in America. I must return to where it all began, to Cambodia, whatever is left of it...I realize that I couldn't deny my history any longer. It was time to reconcile with my past" -Ronnie Yimsut, *Facing The Khmer Rouge*

"Chea, if I survive I will study medicine. I want to help people because I couldn't help you. If I die, I will learn medicine in my next life. That vow helped me cope with my own helplessness and pain, but I never knew how it would later affect my own life in America." -Chanrithy Him, *When Broken Glass Floats*



Cambodian students reenact the genocide on the National Day of Remembrance<sup>6</sup>

To see more quotes and code, scan the QR code. There is a link attached to it as well for anyone on their computer.



## Discussion

- ❖ No matter how much survivors run and continue on with their lives, survivors are still haunted by the memories of their experience.
- ❖ Many ways to cope such as forgiving, distracting themselves with making a life for themselves, and traveling back to Cambodia.
- ❖ There are hidden fears that still lie within survivors; they choose to ignore the past or do not speak of it.

## Future Plan and Limitation

- ❖ Future Plan
  - Talk to Cambodian American young adults about their experience with and their understanding of mental health.
- ❖ Limitations
  - Only one side to a story
  - Bias or the author's intent to writing the book
  - Limited time to read multiple memoirs and peer reviewed articles
  - Some books do not hold the answers
  - Limitations on authors' memory

## References

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